

Washington, DC – Today U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19), Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, led more than 40 Members of Congress to call on President Bush to immediately release additional funding so the Department of Veterans Affairs can meet the needs of America's veterans. H.R. 2764, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, passed by Congress on Wednesday included \$3.7 billion in additional funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Bush administration has indicated that it will not immediately release the funding to the VA, despite the significant challenges facing the VA heading into 2008.

"The list of problems plaguing the VA is endless. It has made virtually no progress in reducing the number of veterans awaiting a decision on their benefit claims or the time veterans wait to get decisions on their claims," said Congressman Hall. "VA regional offices remain understaffed due to past hiring freezes and the loss of veterans' personal identification data early this year shows that work remains to improve the department's security procedures. I have serious concerns about the wait times for veterans seeking initial health care appointments. To add to all their current difficulties, the VA must also prepare for the growing wave of veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom that will seek care in the coming years."

Discussing the omnibus appropriations bill on December 18, 2007, White House Press Secretary Dana Perino said "that the VA's budget is already "robust" and "to the extent that there needs to be additional money spent on veterans, we will take a look at that" before releasing the funds to the VA.

"Almost three years ago, your administration sent a budget request to the Congress that underfunded the Department by over \$1 billion. Further, the VA has repeatedly underestimated the number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans that would seek care from the VA," Congressman Hall and the other legislators wrote in a letter to President Bush. The legislators called Perino's comments "troubling" and said they "hope that they do not represent any Administration complacency on these critical matters."

"After looking at the numerous hurdles facing veterans across the country who seek assistance from the VA - I don't think any rational person could say the VA has all that it needs," said Congressman Hall.

"We believe it is apparent that our nation's veterans deserve to have their Department fully funded and that the VA faces many significant challenges that require funding," wrote the legislators to President Bush. "As such, we request that once the Consolidated Appropriations Act becomes law, you immediately release the \$3.7 billion in contingency emergency funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs."